

Issue: Compliance – Grievance Procedure (5-Day Rule); Ruling Date: March 21, 2019; Ruling No. 2019-4887; Agency: Department of Corrections; Outcome: Grievant Not in Compliance.



**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA**  
**Department of Human Resource Management**  
**Office of Equal Employment and Dispute Resolution**

**COMPLIANCE RULING**

In the matter of the Department of Corrections  
Ruling Number 2019-4887  
March 21, 2019

The Department of Corrections (the “agency”) has requested a compliance ruling from the Office of Equal Employment and Dispute Resolution (“EEDR”) at the Department of Human Resource Management in relation to the grievant’s October 30, 2017 grievance. The agency alleges that the grievant has failed to comply with the time limits set forth in the grievance procedure for advancing or concluding her grievance.

FACTS

On or about October 30, 2017, the grievant initiated a grievance with the agency. The agency states that the first step response was mailed to the grievant on or about November 6, 2017.<sup>1</sup> Having received no further response from the grievant indicating whether she wished to advance or conclude the grievance, the agency sent, via U.S. Mail, a notice of noncompliance to her on February 21, 2019.<sup>2</sup> In its notice of noncompliance, the agency requested a response from the grievant within five workdays of her receipt of the notice. Since more than five workdays have elapsed since the grievant presumably received notice of her alleged noncompliance and she has not yet advanced or concluded her grievance, the agency seeks a compliance ruling allowing it to administratively close the grievance.

DISCUSSION

The grievance procedure requires both parties to address procedural noncompliance through a specific process.<sup>3</sup> That process assures that the parties first communicate with each other about the noncompliance, and resolve any compliance problems voluntarily, without EEDR’s involvement. Specifically, the party claiming noncompliance must notify the other party

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<sup>1</sup> The agency has provided a copy of the first step response, but no indication that the Grievance Form A was completed at that step. [see **first step response, grievance**] While the completion of the grievance form is a necessary step, the lack of a copy of that document at this stage does not impact EEDR’s ruling in this case. As discussed below, the grievant has been sent a noncompliance letter, so it follows that if she intends to still pursue this grievance, she has received ample notice of what steps she must complete to do so through correspondence from the agency and this ruling.

<sup>2</sup> The mailing of correspondence, properly addressed and stamped, raises a presumption of receipt of the correspondence by the addressee. *E.g.*, *Washington v. Anderson*, 236 Va. 316, 322, 373 S.E.2d 712, 715 (1988).

<sup>3</sup> *Grievance Procedure Manual* § 6.3.

in writing and allow five workdays for the opposing party to correct any noncompliance.<sup>4</sup> If the opposing party fails to correct the noncompliance within this five-day period, the party claiming noncompliance may seek a compliance ruling from EEDR, who may in turn order the party to correct the noncompliance or, in cases of substantial noncompliance, render a decision against the noncomplying party on any qualifiable issue. When an EEDR ruling finds that either party to a grievance is in noncompliance, the ruling will (i) order the noncomplying party to correct its noncompliance within a specified time period, and (ii) provide that if the noncompliance is not timely corrected, a decision in favor of the other party will be rendered on any qualifiable issue, unless the noncomplying party can show just cause for the delay in conforming to EEDR's order.<sup>5</sup>

In this case, the grievant appears to have failed to advance or conclude her grievance within five workdays of receiving the agency's first resolution step response, as required by the grievance procedure.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the agency notified the grievant of her noncompliance and she has not advanced or concluded her grievance.

As the grievant has apparently failed to advance or conclude her grievance in a timely manner, she has failed to comply with the grievance procedure. EEDR therefore orders the grievant to correct her noncompliance **within ten workdays of the date of this ruling** by notifying her human resources office in writing that she wishes either to conclude the grievance or advance to the second step. If she does not, the agency may administratively close the grievance without any further action on its part. The grievance may be reopened only upon a timely showing by the grievant of just cause for the delay (for example, a serious illness, or other circumstances beyond the grievant's control).

EEDR's rulings on matters of compliance are final and nonappealable.<sup>7</sup>



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<sup>4</sup> See *id.*

<sup>5</sup> While in cases of substantial noncompliance with procedural rules the grievance statutes grant EEDR the authority to render a decision on a qualifiable issue against a noncompliant party, EEDR favors having grievances decided on the merits rather than procedural violations. Thus, EEDR will *typically* order noncompliance corrected before rendering a decision against a noncompliant party. However, where a party's noncompliance appears driven by bad faith or a gross disregard of the grievance procedure, EEDR will exercise its authority to rule against the party without first ordering the noncompliance to be corrected.

<sup>6</sup> See *Grievance Procedure Manual* § 3.1.

<sup>7</sup> See Va. Code §§ 2.2-1202.1(5), 2.2-3003(G).